

Jeremiah Chapters 3-4 John Karmelich

1. The first chapter of Jeremiah explained why God called him, what He wanted him to preach and what results Jeremiah could expect. Chapter 2 got "hot and heavy" as he explains what God's people were guilty of doing. As we study Chapters 3-4, realize they've got more accusations but emphasize what His people are doing wrong and why that'll lead to horrid punishment!
 - a) That leads to the question, "Why does God punish His people?" and does it apply to us as well? The answer is yes, and more importantly how does God punish believers? As we're reading of how God plans to punish the nation of Israel in these chapters, the question I'd like you to consider is, "OK, what have I done to tick God off and will I suffer for it?"
 - b) Let me put it this way, alcoholics are well aware how they've had to suffer for their sins. I could name lots of examples of believers who battle addictions and their weaknesses and how it caused them to suffer. All of us know of people who are trusting in Jesus to forgive them of all their sins, yet they're still battling those issues. To quote a late pastor I respected, sometimes sin has to suffer a slow, painful and cruel death like "the cross" in order to remove that desire from our lives! Sometimes God's people must be "kicked out the land" in order to kill a problem as serious as idolatry. God not only desires to have an intimate relationship with us, but realize He'll do what's necessary to preventing us from avoiding type of relationship He desires. Sometimes God even allows our death so that others will draw closer to Him by us being a witness for Him.
 - c) Yes this is hard stuff. Not denying it. For those of us not battling any major addictions at the moment, most of us know that we're only a "sin away" from messing up. I'd argue that most of us are well aware of our strong and our weak suits. The challenge is to turn all of that over to God and say, "You're completely in charge of every aspect of our lives". To quote another famous Christian expression, "The problem of being to be a living sacrifice for God is we keep crawling off the altar!" I'm not saying we must kill ourselves or spend all day in church. I'm saying the best way to be a witness for Jesus is to daily put our trust in Him to guide our lives. Will we then be sin free? Of course not, however, we can live as God desires if we trust in His power to do so. That's the point.
2. OK John, nice speech. What does any of this have to do with these chapters of Jeremiah? I would say everything! Jeremiah jumps back and forth between narrative and poetry as if to say, here is what God's saying is wrong with the way we're living. Sometimes I (Jeremiah) like to use poetry to describe the problem and sometimes I just need to write about it. Either way, God's making it obvious to me (Jeremiah) that I need to get off my chest just how you (God's people) are messing up and what that'll cost us! The reason God wants us to study this isn't to say, "Well too bad for those people!" It's to think about our lives and realize that a perfect God doesn't want anything to come between an intimate relationship with Him. Avoiding sin isn't to try to live a perfect life. It's about living the way God desires we live so we can be a good witness to the way He desires we live, period!
3. With that said, let me try to summarize a lot of text in these two chapters:
 - a) Jeremiah starts by citing an Old Testament law that says if a man divorces his wife, he can not remarry her again. The reason is so a man won't divorce her "for no good reason" and then change his mind and marry her again! His point is that the nation of Israel "divorced" God in order to pursue other gods (and interests). Jeremiah ends this section by stating the fact that God's willing to forgive them if they're seriously willing to turn back to Him in spite of the fact He "hates divorce" in the sense of His relationship with believers! Then Jeremiah discusses the fact that God "had to divorce" the Northern Israel Kingdom. It occurred roughly a hundred years earlier, that the "North" was conquered. God called it a divorce in the sense they got so corrupt, He had to let them suffer, as there's nothing more that could change the situation. God wanted the still existing "South" to learn from that!

- b) Remember when Jeremiah was writing this, the "South" Israel kingdom (called Judah) is still alive and kicking. However, they were repeating the exact mistake the "North" made as they refused to learn. That's why judgment is coming to the "South".
 - c) The rest of Chapter 3 is essentially God begging the Israelites to "learn from history". They could continue forever as His kingdom with God ruling over them if they'd just turn from how they were living! A lot of verses are dedicated to the idea of, "Bad punishment awaits but can be avoided if we confess and turn from how we're living". The point for us is that God's patience with us is not limitless in the sense He'll do what it takes to draw us back to Him. Yes it's a hard lesson, but it reminds us of the danger of not living as God desires we live. Is it convicting? Of course, to me as well!
 - d) By Chapter 4 (as I love to say, no chapter breaks in the original text), God's pleading with His people to "break up our fallow ground". It's a colorful way of saying, change the way you're living. Just as soil has to be cleaned of weeds and "turned" in order to plant seeds, that is also a good analogy of how God wants us to repent and turn back to Him! Then we read of Jeremiah giving more examples and illustrations as to teach, "Judgment is coming and it's bad. If you're willing to repent, all of that can be avoided!" As always, the issue isn't salvation. It's about being a good witness for Jesus as go through life. That's why He created us in the first place. A failure to do so, means punishment us is coming and trust me, it's not good!
 - e) Jeremiah makes illusions to the coming Babylonian invasion that'll destroy what is left of Israel as a nation. He states in Chapter 3 that he wrote this section (Chapters 2-6) when a king was on the throne named Josiah. My point is Babylon wasn't a significant threat at that point. Therefore, Jeremiah's saying, "God knows the future and it's not good!" What we're reading is a combination of a warning of how bad it's going to be, but all of it can be avoided if they're just willing to turn from sin. Yes it's bad and that's the point.
 - f) I could give a lot more details, but I'll save that for my verse-by-verse commentary.
 - g) Oh, my lesson title is "God's punishment for believers and why it's necessary". Yes this is a scary lesson, but unfortunately one we always need to hear. God loves to apply a "carrot and stick" approach to our relationship with Him. It's the sense that He promises us great blessings if we stick close to Him and He's not above "applying the stick" to get us to turn back to Him. Yes this section is "more stick than carrot", but all of us can suffer just as the Israelites did back then if we refuse to live as He desires. Therefore, lets all take a big deep breath as we take on this tough but necessary lesson on God's discipline of our lives!
4. Chapter 3, Verse 1: "If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled? But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers-- would you now return to me?" declares the LORD.
- a) Let's start by remembering we're in the middle of a sermon that runs from Chapter 2 to the end of Chapter 6. Jeremiah jumps back and forth between poetry style writing and a narrative style. Some scholars argue that parts were added later. Personally, I don't care. God wanted us to read it as it stands for millenniums, and it is what it is!
 - b) As an illustration Jeremiah uses a law written in the book of Deuteronomy (24:1-4). It says in effect that if a man divorces a woman he can't remarry her again. God set up this law to discourage easy divorces in case we think, "I can always marry her again!" Jeremiah stated this law to the leaders of Israel who knew of it. It was meant as an illustration.
 - i) His point is even though that law is in effect, God's willing to "make an exception" in the sense that Southern Kingdom was full of idols as the people were probably going through the "God motions" then "doing what they want otherwise! Yes they had statues to false gods then. While believers may not have such statues, we still are willing to "give God lip service on Sunday" and do what we want when we are not in church. Are you saying God's going to strike me dead if I don't change? We don't know how long God's patience will last, but it is not limitless!

- ii) Let me put it this way: The book of Revelation includes seven letters Jesus wrote to seven churches. Of those seven letters, five of them told churches to repent of their sins or their "witness will be taken away". Again, the issue isn't our salvation, but our witness for Him. I'm not saying we can't have down time or go have hobbies. I'm saying we're "always on the clock" for Jesus in every moment of our lives, and we must keep that in mind!
 - c) All of this leads back to Jeremiah. His point here is despite the law saying that one cannot return to one's own wife, God desires an intimate relationship with believers like that of a healthy long term marriage. God's essentially using Jeremiah to plead to have that type of a relationship with His people!
- 5. Verse 2: "Look up to the barren heights and see. Is there any place where you have not been ravished? By the roadside you sat waiting for lovers, sat like a nomad in the desert. You have defiled the land with your prostitution and wickedness.
 - a) The Israelites could say, "What are you talking about? We go to synagogue every week. It is not our fault other people in Israel worship idols". God's response is effectively, "You're the leaders of Israel. You are responsible! If you put your "hearts" into your desire to seek Me then the people will follow!
 - b) Let me describe some of the illustrations being described here. The Israelites in those days made statues to their idols on the top of barren hills. It was the idea of "being proud of the things they worshipped" and setting up a statue on top of a hill. It's the old adage that we are more excited for say, our favorite sports team then we are for God.
 - c) The next illustration is "roadside waiting for lovers". The worship of Baal required having sex with strangers, and thus that illustration. The third one is about "bandits" in the desert waiting for opportunities. It's about waiting for their "time" to do what's not right.
 - d) All of these are examples of how people who God called to be His witnesses to the world care more about serving other things other than God.
- 6. Verse 3: Therefore the showers have been withheld, and no spring rains have fallen. Yet you have the brazen look of a prostitute; you refuse to blush with shame. ⁴ Have you not just called to me: 'My Father, my friend from my youth, ⁵ will you always be angry? Will your wrath continue forever?' This is how you talk, but you do all the evil you can."
 - a) The Israelites could ask Jeremiah, "How do we know God's ticked off at us? What proof is there of what you claim? The answer's to remember that Israel was an agricultural society in those days. They don't have piped water to springs! They depended upon rain in both the fall and the spring to water the crops. Apparently it was a "dry season" when it should have been the rainy season. That was Jeremiah's proof that God is noticing their behavior and wants change or "it'll be a lot worse than that!"
 - b) Jeremiah's next point is despite that obvious problem, you (as a nation) refused to change. It is as if they dress like a prostitute with no shame. The Israelite leaders claim that God is "their father and their friend from youth", but their not "putting their money where their mouth is" so to speak.
 - c) OK John, enough of the guilt trip. What do I have to if anything? The issue at hand isn't how much we do at church or other ministry projects. The issue is our hearts. Do we do all those works to try to earn God's favor (wrong) or out of gratitude for what God's done for us (right). Then do we go through life doing our best to live by His rules not so we can earn His favor, but simply out of gratitude. OK you get the idea, we got a long way to go!
- 7. Verse 6: During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me, "Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there. ⁷ I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it.
 - a) Here we get the "time stamp" of this section of the book. During the reign of King Josiah.

- b) To put it simply he was the last good king before things went down here really fast. Josiah started a reform based on the fact his father hated God. Josiah started a religious reform to repair the temple ignored during the time of his father. The problem was the reform had a lot of religious conformity, but their heart wasn't into it. During that time, Israelites living in the Southern Kingdom were still going to the "high hills" to build monuments to all the false gods of that time era. God compares this practice to adultery. That's because like the practice of idolatry is about turning from God. Adultery is about turning from a spouse. I would argue it's a good comparison make.
 - c) Then in Verse 7 we get a comparison of the Northern "long dead" Israel kingdom to those living in the current southern Kingdom. The point is those in the South were well aware of the fact the North turned from God long before they were destroyed. Therefore, God is holding the "South" more accountable because they saw the death of the "North" because they turned from God and didn't change their ways even with that knowledge.
 - d) Jesus said in effect, "To whom much is given, much is expected" (Luke 12:48). The point is if we know better, God holds us more accountable. That is a scary thought for Americans as the bible is so readily available online and on our phones! I'd argue that most of us who reach an age of accountability are more accountable than even these Israelites as we got all this evidence in "our laps" and should know better.
 - e) Now that I've poured on the guilt, it's time to move on!
8. Verse 8: I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. ⁹ Because Israel's immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood. ¹⁰ In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense," declares the LORD.
- a) Jeremiah got on a role beginning in Verse 6 describing how the Northern Israel Kingdom died not because the Assyrian Empire was too powerful, but because they refused to turn to God for generation after generation and God finally "pulled the plug" on them.
 - b) Those in the Southern Kingdom could think, "But we got the Temple here! We keep all of the rituals going! God can't wipe us out because He'd lose His witness to the world. Yes, we know we're bad but we're all God's got". What those Israelites (and us) can't forget is God will always leave His remnant in the world but if He has to wipe out a nation or say a church for failing to be a witness for Him, He can and He will.
 - c) Notice the reference to "stone and wood". Those were the building materials the Israelites used to build their statues to the false gods. The South Kingdom was essentially doing all of the same things despite the fact they knew that's what killed the North Kingdom.
 - d) I can hear you thinking, "I don't build little statues to false gods", notice Verse 10 that says, "Only in pretense". That's the idea of us going through "Christian rituals" but our hearts is not in it. That's the accusation. Even if we're praying daily, we all know that turning away from God is "a sin away". Ok there's my guilt offering for these verses. Let's move on!
9. Verse 11: The LORD said to me, "Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah. ¹² Go, proclaim this message toward the north: " `Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD, `I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,' declares the LORD, `I will not be angry forever. ¹³ Only acknowledge your guilt-- you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me,' " declares the LORD.
- a) At this point Jeremiah preaches to the Israelites still living in the "North". God's saying in effect, "it's never too late to turn back to God" (as long as we're still alive)!
 - b) Remember that the book of Jeremiah wasn't organized as a book and spread around until all those Israelites were in captivity. When Babylon conquered the Assyrian Empire, they inherited all their people. The point is former "North" Israelites could read all of this!

- c) OK John we get the idea that Israelites living around Jeremiah's time could learn that "it's never to late to repent". You're preaching to devout Christians. Why should we care about all this? So when we fail (and we will) or when we struggle with a sin, we too can know it is never to late to repent. As long as we're breathing we can make the decision turn from an issue we're struggling with. Remember the issue isn't salvation, but being a good witness for Jesus, which is in effect the purpose for living in the first place!
 - d) The specifics for the Israelites were turning to other gods. The specifics for us could be the same thing as we spend our free time focusing on things other than what He has called us to do as a witness for Him. If you have no idea what He wants you to do, surrender your time and will to His. I find that God can't resist a prayer of surrender and He'll make the answer to that prayer obvious to us over time, if we're serious about surrendering our life and our time to Him.
 - e) Meanwhile Jeremiah's on a role, and I interrupted him!
10. Verse 14: "Return, faithless people," declares the LORD, "for I am your husband. I will choose you--one from a town and two from a clan--and bring you to Zion. ¹⁵ Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.
- a) Keep in mind that when God first called Jeremiah in Chapter 1, God warned him that his message wouldn't be accepted. It wasn't until the captivity began that Israelites started to take his message seriously. Therefore, picture such people living somewhere in the huge territory that made up the Assyrian and then the Babylonian captivity thinking, "Hold on, I'm still one of "God's chosen? Our nation will exist again one day and my family will be able to return there? You mean there is hope? Then God will pick leaders who know how to properly teach His word and lead people closer to Him?"
 - b) Notice Jeremiah refers to God as Israel's husband. There are other times we're called to be His children. Revelation calls us as the "bride of Christ". My point is don't let all of those titles confuse you. These are just colorful ways of saying God wants us to draw as close to Him as one would to a spouse or a parent. For those of you thinking, "My life is good just as it is, why should I draw close to God?" The answer's that no matter how long we'll get to live, it's a whole lot less than forever! If we can't live for God now, what makes us think we can live for Him forever? We might as well get used to it now, and that's the point.
 - c) For the rest of us, "I'm preaching to the choir" and I know it. Think of this section as a big reminder of the danger of turning away from Him and why we should strive to stick close to Him to guide our lives.
 - d) The good news of Jeremiah, is it's not 100% "guilt trip"! Some positive stuff comes next!
11. Verse 16: In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the LORD, "men will no longer say, `The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. ¹⁷ At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. ¹⁸ In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance.
- a) As I love to preach, God loves the "carrot and the stick" approach to our relationship with Him. The "carrot" is that life on earth will not always continue the way it is right now. A day will come when Jesus literally will rule over the earth. I'm sure that's what Jeremiah's alluding to even though he doesn't fully comprehend it. Let me explain:
 - b) The centerpiece of Jewish worship at that time was a box called the "Ark of the covenant". The idea is it was the location of God's presence. In that box were the 10 Commandments, a "short version" of what God expects us of. Blood was then splattered on the box as if to say "The shedding of innocent blood preserves our lives by trusting in that sacrifice!" For the Israelites to accept "the box won't be needed anymore" is a big thing to accept!

- c) One of the great historical mysteries is whatever happened to that gold covered box? For those who've seen the movie "Raider's of The Lost Ark" was a theory how it was found by Nazi's in World War II. Pure fiction. Current theories is it's still buried below the Temple site in Jerusalem, or it's in Ethiopia. Whether it's actually found one day is irrelevant to the point of whether or not it'll be needed when the Messiah, who us Christians argue is Jesus returns to rule the world from Israel. The point is when He rules the Ark won't be needed to be a "prop" in any worship ritual!
 - d) So how do we know this passage isn't discussing the Israelites returning to their land after 70 years in captivity (to be discussed much more in later lessons)? For starters, no Messiah showed up after that period of time! Keep in mind that both Jewish and Christian teachers of prophesy stress the fact that predictions are often "patterns". In this case, there's a short term fulfillment of prophesy when Israel did return to the land after 70 years. Notice that in Verse 18 the emphasis of "return from the north". If one looks at a map, Babylon is east of Israel. To travel on foot to Israel, one has to go north first as that way one goes through better locations (in terms of food and more hospital climate) to enter that land! The point is just as Israel was conquered from the North, so their return to their land will come from that same direction.
 - i) We know this section has a double fulfillment as Verse 17 says that Jerusalem will be called "The throne of the Lord" and all nations will be gathered there to worship the true God. Let's just say it's not a popular idea in the Muslim world right now! In order for this prophesy to come true, it has to be future and it has to be a day of the whole world accepting (or being forced to accept) Jesus rule over the world!
 - ii) The point as it ties to Jeremiah's speech here is in effect that things won't always continue the way they were at that time or even as it stands today! OK then, why should I worry about when Jesus will return when I got enough issues on my plate at the moment? It's not about worrying, it's about accepting the fact that in spite of whatever we're dealing with, it won't go on forever! A day will come when God is literally going to rule the world and force everyone to live by His rules and it does not matter if we like it or not! Again, we're back to the issue of "We better get used to living as Jesus desires now, as we'll be living that way forever and ever!"
 - iii) The proof that all of this is true is God writes history in advance. The fact that the Nation of Israel was taken into captivity, scattered, became a nation again has not been repeated by any group in human history, and Israel did it twice! My point is if you want proof that the bible is the word of God, study Israel's history.
 - iv) In the meantime, we got a long way to go.
12. Verse 19: "I myself said, " `How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.' I thought you would call me `Father' and not turn away from following me.
- a) OK enough of the good news. Time to return to condemnation!
 - b) Here we have God pleading with the Israelites! He's saying in effect, "Don't you realize how much I want to bless you (corporately) if you'll just live as a witness for Me? God is complimenting the land of Israel in effect by saying, "If you do as I say and you'll be living better than all the other countries around you".
 - c) Here we get an Old Testament reference to referring to God as "Father", an intimate way of greeting God that has never been used by the Israelites from "then to this day". In fact when Jesus told us to pray that way, it was very controversial to a Jewish way of thinking.
 - d) Bottom line is we have a plea by God through Jeremiah to "please honor Me as God and it will bless your life far more than anything else we can seek.
 - e) OK what does that mean for us Christians? The short version is if making God the center figure of our life is a far more joyful way to live than anything else we could ever pursue!

13. Verse 20: But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. ²¹ A cry is heard on the barren heights, the weeping and pleading of the people of Israel, because they have perverted their ways and have forgotten the LORD their God.
- a) If you haven't noticed, God loves comparing adultery to turning from Him. In both cases it's about turning from the one we've made a commitment to. That's why it works. That's leading to suffering (probably a prediction of the upcoming invasion). He's saying they're going to suffer not because this enemy wants to conquer all of the Middle East. They only are going to suffer for ignoring God.
 - b) OK then, so if we fail to be a witness for God, does that mean we too will be wiped out? I wouldn't put pass God to do anything to get us to do what He's called us to do, to use our lives as a witness for Him. I'm sure not all suffering comes from ignoring God. Still think of it as a "checklist". When things are going wrong, pause, consider any sins that could be a source of the problem. Once we let them go and commit our lives to Him, we then move on and make the best decisions possible. That's how life should work for the Christian.
 - c) Meanwhile Jeremiah's still pleading for people to change before it's too late!
14. Verse 22: "Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding." "Yes, we will come to you, for you are the LORD our God.
- a) Most of us who have spent a significant amount of time in "church life" have heard what's translated "backsliding". It refers to believers who have turned from God. It's used in the Old Testament as well as in the church!
 - b) I admit I'm fascinated by the phrase "cure you of backsliding". Can God actually remove our desire to turn from sin? Don't think so. However, I do know when I'm accountable to other believers and make the effort daily to seek Him, my desire is less. I think Jeremiah's preaching in effect the same thing. It's a "fake it to you make it" philosophy. Once we are making the effort to stick close to Him, we see the benefit and keep going!
 - c) With that said, this verse reminds us that once we make that effort God promises He will reciprocate. Ever want an answer to prayer? A commitment to Him promises it! Test it!
15. Verse 23: Surely the idolatrous commotion on the hills and mountains is a deception; surely in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel.
- a) The reason the text is so obsessed with "hills and mountains" is that's where the Israelites were making statues to false gods, sacrificing to them and even engaging in sexual acts in order to "turn on" these false gods. The motivation is "Baal" promised prosperity as well as a good life. God's saying in effect, "I'll give you all of that and more! I promise eternal life for those who trust in Me". To me, any benefit I get in this life for being a Christian is just a bonus! If my eternal soul is at stake, that should be motivation enough to get us to live as a witness for Him!
16. Verse 24: From our youth shameful gods have consumed the fruits of our fathers' labor-- their flocks and herds, their sons and daughters. ²⁵ Let us lie down in our shame, and let our disgrace cover us. We have sinned against the LORD our God, both we and our fathers; from our youth till this day we have not obeyed the LORD our God."
- a) God's not only encouraging them to repent, but also show signs of remorse. Why is that necessary? Why show remorse? Are we earning God's favor by doing that? The answer is much simpler than that. It's about making a display to show that we're sorry for how it is we've acted and we're willing to change. It's not like we have to "repent this much and then we're forgiven". It's about attitude! It's about being serious about how we serve our God and truly caring about our personal relationship with Him! The "carrot and stick" is both there telling us in effect, "What are you nuts? What choice do we really have in life if we think about the fact our eternity is at stake!" Even for us devout Christians all this is a big reminder of what's important in life and how we should be motivated to live!

17. Chapter 4, Verse 1: "If you will return, O Israel, return to me," declares the LORD. "If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray, ² and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, 'As surely as the LORD lives,' then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory."
- a) In the original Hebrew, we're reading poetry. It's God pleading with His people to turn to Him and turn away from idols. Then the Israelites will get the corporate blessings they're desiring. Remember that the land depended upon rain for their crops to grow. That's one reason why they pleaded with Baal. God's saying, "I'm God, I know what you need. I am the one who brought all of you here in the first place. Not only will I provide what you do need to be a witness for Me, but you're existence will be a blessing to those around you, as you live as a witness for Me".
 - b) Obviously that message hasn't changed today. No Christians are not all gathered together in one place. Still, living as God desired means we won't corporately suffer. Jeremiah did gain popularity only after the Babylonian captivity began as then "they got the point". The message for us is to get the point before God has to get that desperate with us!
18. Verse 3: This is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem: "Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns. ⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done--burn with no one to quench it.
- a) The first time I ever attended a Christian conference the topic of it was " Break up your unplowed ground". My only point is Verse 3 is personal to me for lots of reasons!
 - b) Obviously, Jeremiah isn't being literal about either turning soil over or going through the act of circumcision. In both cases Jeremiah is using an analogy that those Israelites could relate to. As a farming community, they knew that in order to plant crops, one has to get rid of thorns and turn soil over in order to plant seeds. They also understood that the act of circumcision didn't literally save you. It's a sign that one is committed to serving God with our lives. This is God saying through Jeremiah, "You claim you worship Me, then I want you to put your money and your time where your mouth is!"
 - c) Then Jeremiah is "back to the stick". He says that if they fail to change, they're suffer in a way that will be so damaging, it'll wipe them out as a nation for Him!
 - d) I can just hear some of you thinking, "Well, what about nonbelievers? They don't care as they go through their lives, why should we suffer for this fate? The answer is for those of us in our midst who don't believe in God, this is the only joy they'll have for eternity. We are called to be a witness because we never know who God is called to save! As to why it is necessary for a punishment this bad, the answer comes back to why we were created in the first place, to be a witness for Him. If we fail, God will raise up someone else, but we can and do lose our opportunity to be a witness for Him.
 - e) OK, enough of my preaching, time to let Jeremiah take over again!
19. Verse 5: "Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say: 'Sound the trumpet throughout the land!' Cry aloud and say: 'Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities!' ⁶ Raise the signal to go to Zion! Flee for safety without delay! For I am bringing disaster from the north, even terrible destruction."
- a) Keep in mind two things as we read this. God told Jeremiah back in Chapter 1 that what he said would be rejected. The second thing was reading Jeremiah was popular only after they were taken into captivity. At that point the Israelites realized, "OK, Jeremiah truly is a prophet of God, let's see what else God wants to communicate to us.
 - b) I'm saying all of this as Jeremiah's predicting the Babylonian captivity about 20 years prior to their first invasion. Babylon is pretty much east of Israel. However their invasion came from the north, as that's the easier way for armies to travel to Israel. Yes it was horrible as many people died then. The rest were marched away and separated from each other.

- c) Let me ask a different question: What was Babylonia's motivation? Obviously they didn't care about the Israelite God. Part of it was they were working their way south to go attack Egypt, which was the other great power of that time. The bonus was getting all the gold of the temple as well as taking prisoners captives to be slaves for them!
 - d) OK John, this is sad, but we don't fear our neighboring countries invading us. However, I would never put it past God to find other ways to say to us, "Come back to me or else"! I'll just leave it at that and move on!
20. Verse 7: A lion has come out of his lair; a destroyer of nations has set out. He has left his place to lay waste your land. Your towns will lie in ruins without inhabitant. ⁸ So put on sackcloth, lament and wail, for the fierce anger of the LORD has not turned away from us. ⁹ "In that day," declares the LORD, "the king and the officials will lose heart, the priests will be horrified, and the prophets will be appalled."
- a) Jeremiah along with a lot of the prophets love to use the illustration of a lion to describe a nation or an empire attacking Israel. Because lions are something we should naturally fear if they're not behind a wall, so a powerful nation with soldiers in far greater numbers is a thing to be feared, especially when God's going to allow it happen. Jeremiah's saying this is going to be bad! Israelite cities will be left desolate as the survivors will be carried away to foreign lands. For those who don't know the practice of the Assyrians and Babylonians was to take the people they capture, separate them and relocate them so they won't unite again to rebel against the empire! The point here is God's saying all of this is going to be a reality for those Israelites living in that Southern Kingdom as it'll be no more, and soon!
 - b) Jeremiah goes to predict that all of Israel's leaders (civil and religious) will be horrified by what's about to occur. Most scholars date this section as being about 20 years before that Babylonian invasion took place!
 - c) OK John, why should I care about this ancient history? We may not fear being taken over by another nation, but the reality of losing our witness for Jesus is always a motivation. I have personally seen many people lose their ministry opportunities and had to walk away from what God's called them to do. The point is we're always a "sin away" not from losing our salvation, but by God saying to us, "There's a limit to My patience and you're pushing it right now!" With that tough reminder out there, let's return to Jeremiah.
21. Verse 10: Then I said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, how completely you have deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying, 'You will have peace,' when the sword is at our throats."
- a) Apparently there were false teachers at that time saying, "Don't worry God's not going to forsake us, we've all He's got!" Jeremiah believed what God told Him was about to occur and he also knew others were preaching peace! So how do we know who to believe when people are preaching contradictory things? For starters, we have the bible and history will repeat itself, so we must learn from it! Next we can simply watch the results of what it is people preach. Jeremiah wasn't accepted as a prophet until after that invasion! When I'm told about some future prediction as being God inspired, I simply watch to see if it comes to pass. Until then I try to live as God calls me to live. It's about controlling what we are able to control and giving to God what is beyond our control!
22. Verse 11: At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, "A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward my people, but not to winnow or cleanse; ¹² a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce my judgments against them."
- a) In Hebrew, there are different words for wind to describe different kinds. Wind was used to help the Israelites separate their wheat crop from what was worthless. However there's another type of wind that's so powerful, it's not good for anything but destruction! That's Jeremiah's way of saying, the destruction to come is going to be so bad, it's just like one of those horrid winds, where all one can do is take shelter and wait for it to pass!
 - b) Yes it's another way of describing His judgment on those who refuse to live as He desires we live. It's the reminder that God created us to glorify Him and suffering awaits failure!

23. Verse 13: Look! He advances like the clouds, his chariots come like a whirlwind, his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! We are ruined! ¹⁴ O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbor wicked thoughts?
- a) Notice the "carrot and stick" approach in these two verses. Verse 13 is obviously read in hindsight of the coming invasion. Verse 14 is the "carrot" saying in effect, if we're willing to change all of this can be avoided.
 - b) A couple of thoughts, you can imagine how set in their ways the Israelites were if no one was willing to listen to Jeremiah's message. To those Israelites who later lived in captivity they have to see this passage as another stark reminder that "There is a too late". It's much more "present" than eternity. It's about the cost of turning from God and realizing there is a horrid penalty for failing to live, as He desires. If having the God of the Universe tell us we need to change doesn't convict us, I don't know what will!
24. Verse 15: A voice is announcing from Dan, proclaiming disaster from the hills of Ephraim. ¹⁶ "Tell this to the nations, proclaim it to Jerusalem: `A besieging army is coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah. ¹⁷ They surround her like men guarding a field, because she has rebelled against me,' " declares the LORD.
- a) Verse 15 requires a little geography knowledge. Dan and Ephraim were two of the twelve tribes of Israel and their area was the northern parts of Israel. The point is the invasion is coming from the north, and they need to sound the alarm! But John, wasn't the Northern Israel kingdom was long dead at this point? Yes, but those living in that territory were a mixture of Israelites and non-Israelites. The point the Israelites living there should care to warn the Israelites living south that really bad disaster coming.
 - b) The next horrid thought to discuss is that of a "seize". In ancient times the way an army is able to defeat a city surrounded by walls was to surround it with a large number of troops to starve it out! That method was used by the Assyrians and the Babylonians to defeat all of Israel as well as other nations they conquered. The army was paid in what they took in wiping out that city!
 - c) Bottom line is this horrible is coming and God's holding Israelites responsible for a failure to be a witness for Him. Yes Jeremiah is colorful and going on and on about this. What is to be learned for us is the danger of failing to be a witness for God. It's a painful lesson to hear and hopefully we learn the "easy way" to avoid this "hard way" to accept His will!
25. Verse 18: "Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is! How it pierces to the heart!" ¹⁹ Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. For I have heard the sound of the trumpet; I have heard the battle cry. ²⁰ Disaster follows disaster; the whole land lies in ruins. In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter in a moment. ²¹ How long must I see the battle standard and hear the sound of the trumpet? ²² "My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good."
- a) By now you're getting used to what Jeremiah is preaching so I can take a bunch of verses at once! Realize Jeremiah didn't enjoy this! It wasn't like God told him to preach disaster for your people, now go have fun! Everything Jeremiah knew about life will soon come to an end, and it was a tough thing to preach! Jeremiah historically is known as the weeping prophet because he understand the horrid he was preaching and wanted it prevented!
 - b) The question is how different is that from what we Christians are called to preach? We're called to tell people that eternal hell awaits those who refuse to put their trust in Jesus. I'd argue we're also called to preach to the believers to use their lives to make a difference so we're not wasting our lives either. To use another famous expression, the job of a preacher of the Gospel is to "Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable". My point is Jeremiah is doing exactly that here in these verses, warning of disaster to come and it's avoidable if the Israelites are simply willing to use their lives as a witness for God as they were told!

- c) I could give more details, but these verses are pretty self-evident once you see them in the light of "change before it's too late". Even those Israelites and us reading this and thinking "It's already too late for me, I've messed up my life too much!" God's message is as long as we're breathing it's never too late to be used by Him for His glory! All God requires is our willingness to surrender our will to His and let Him guide us from that point forward!
- d) With that said, Jeremiah does something interesting in the next few verses:
26. Verse 23: I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone. ²⁴ I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. ²⁵ I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. ²⁶ I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger.
- a) If these verses have a familiar ring to them, it's because they're a lot like Genesis 1. It's as if Jeremiah in his own colorful way is saying God's going to reverse the creation process we are familiar with in Genesis 1. Obviously He wasn't going to destroy the world again like the days of the flood, but the land of Israel itself will experience that type of ruin. It went from being a productive and fruitful land to a desolate one after the Babylonian captivity.
- b) I'd argue it's only because of God's grace the Israelites were allowed to return there after a 70 year captivity and again after World War II. It's proof that God's anger at His people is not an eternal thing in the sense that He always desires to work through us to be a witness for Him. The question is always are we willing to be used by Him or does He have to look for others of what we are either too fearful to do or don't want to do?
- c) The point is God gave Jeremiah this vision of the land of Israel being wasted long before it was a reality! Obviously it hints at all the horrid things Revelation speaks of to occur one day as well! Remember that much of prophesy is "patterns" and not just single events!
- d) The good news is we're almost through this section, so bear with me as I've only got a few more verses to cover in this section!
27. Verse 27: This is what the LORD says: "The whole land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely. ²⁸ Therefore the earth will mourn and the heavens above grow dark, because I have spoken and will not relent, I have decided and will not turn back." ²⁹ At the sound of horsemen and archers every town takes to flight. Some go into the thickets; some climb up among the rocks. All the towns are deserted; no one lives in them.
- a) First, let's consider Verse 27, God essentially says, "All of Israel (land) will be ruined but it will not be destroyed completely". Either it means some people will still live there. That's what occurred, or it's a hint that God will bring His people back there one day. The point is that God's decision is "final" and there's no appeal to a higher court.
- b) So if God's decision was final, why did Jeremiah bother preaching? Because there may be some individuals who draw closer to God through that destruction. God's always looking for people to turn to Him through good times and bad. It's kind like saying, "Yes it's going to get horrible around here, but that's no excuse to not serve Me as God, as that's why we were created in the first place.
- c) Also realize Verse 28 about "earth will morn and heavens growing dark" is not meant as a literal reference. It's the idea that God's collective witness to the world is being placed in a penalty box for awhile, so in that sense "the earth mourns". Verse 29 is describing what is going to happen to Israel as the foreign army marches in: The Israel soldiers will flee and look for hiding places. The local towns (as well as the big cities) will all be deserted.
- d) OK John, we all know this was a horrid time historically for God's people. We also know they returned there after 70 years. Hit us with the "why should we care" speech one more time! The issue's not about learning history. The issue is history can always repeat at any time! Even if we're devout Christians using our lives to make a difference for Him, if our society grows to a point where the majority of people are in effect mocking God, what do you think He'd do to our society that's any different than what He's doing here?

- i) Even if you think, "I can't change the world around me". God's not asking most of us to do that. What He asks is we live differently enough that we are a witness to the world around us and we're "different enough" that our lives become that type of witness He desires. That's the underlying goal here.
 - ii) In the meantime, I've only got two more verses to go!
- 28. Verse 30: What are you doing, O devastated one? Why dress yourself in scarlet and put on jewels of gold? Why shade your eyes with paint? You adorn yourself in vain. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life.
 - a) This verse essentially describes Israelites going after their attackers effectively appealing to them to protect their own lives. In Europe in WWII, there were Jewish people who did pretend to be Roman Catholic to preserve their own lives. In a sense, that's a little like the idea here, but at least Catholics and Protestants worship the same God as the Jewish one. In this case it's about turning to try to win over the enemy to save their lives!
 - b) While I don't know the specifics, I can just picture Israelite women offering themselves to their captors. It could also apply to the Assyrian and Egyptians as they battled over this territory. No matter who it referred to, the issue is about going "all out" to avoid seeking the God who we're called to serve. Examples of that have existed throughout history.
- 29. Verse 31: I hear a cry as of a woman in labor, a groan as of one bearing her first child-- the cry of the Daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands and saying, "Alas! I am fainting; my life is given over to murderers."
 - a) In this final verse (however, Jeremiah's speech continues for two more chapters), you can sense the frustration he felt as he sensed how desperate people would become as they're faced with people who want to either kill them or force them into captivity. The book of "Lamentations" which comes after Jeremiah gets more into that. In the meantime, what it is we're dealing with here is a nation that turned from God and now they're paying for it in a horrid way.
 - b) The obvious lesson is about the danger of turning from how God expects us to live. Yes I know this is a hard lesson to deal with. Unfortunately we all need to know the dangers of not living as God desired, both in the case of the believer as well as the nonbeliever. What I desire that we learn from this section is the importance of "sticking at it". It's more than a desire to have heavenly eternal rewards. It's also a matter of not wanting to disappoint the God who created us and set us apart to serve Him in the first place!
 - c) With that tough but necessary thought floating through our heads, let's close in prayer:
- 30. Heavenly Father, As devout Christians, we're well aware that You apply the "carrot and stick" approach to our relationship with You. Help us to continually have that desire to seek You and use our lives as a witness for You so the "stick" won't be necessary. Guide us as to how You want to use us as a witness for You. May we depend upon Your spirit for that guidance and be led in a way that You desire we live for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen!